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HARK
TO
THESE
THREE
BY
STURGE
MOORE

ALVIN
MATHEWS
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HARK TO THESE THREE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

- 1899. THE VINEDRESSER AND OTHER
POEMS
- 1901. APHRODITE AGAINST ARTEMIS
- 1903. ABSALOM
- 1903. DANÆ
- 1905. THE LITTLE SCHOOL
- 1906. POEMS
- 1911. MARIAMNE
- 1911. A SICILIAN IDYLL AND JUDITH
- 1914. THE SEA IS KIND

PROSE

- 1899. THE CENTAUR AND THE BAC-
CHANT FROM THE FRENCH BY
MAURICE DE GUÉRIN
- 1900. ALTDORFER
- 1904. DÜRER
- 1906. CORREGGIO
- 1910. ART AND LIFE (FLAUBERT AND
BLAKE)

**HARK TO THESE THREE
TALK ABOUT STYLE
BY · STURGE MOORE**

**LONDON · ELKIN MATHEWS
CORK STREET · MDCCCCXV**

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HARK TO THESE THREE

STRIDING out from under trees, two men, Londoners of the professional class, see at last how the long ridges combed with beech-woods slope up west. Under each some southward-facing farm nestles with stubble fields before it, and these, spread out on the green concave lap, look like gigantic sheets a-drying, so thick are the hedges. Alfred Cahil, a "nice boy" of twenty-five, has published his first novel, one of the earliest to introduce a flying accident as catastrophe. He studied engineering at Cambridge, but literature threatens to prove his dominant interest. Twice his age, Vincent Brown, a solicitor and sometime enthusiastic social reformer, now places the attainment of goals once so temptingly near well beyond his lifetime; and, reading less economics, adds to his collection of drawings and is known at more studios every year. He is saying:

"Stanton was wild younger, at Paris. At least, who knows? Sexual licence is the sole topic on which fact is not distinct from fiction for the average student there."

“ And now he lives six miles from a station ? ”

“ You see that tree detached from the wood ; the cottage lies behind it, fifty steps below the brow. Had he a fire we might see the smoke.”

“ No studio, then ? ”

“ He works in the room upstairs ; sleeps, eats and reads in the kitchen.”

“ Don’t tell me his designs are done without models ? ”

“ He has stacks of studies drawn at Paris. J. P. Laurens, Gustave Moreau and Rodin mark the three epochs of his time there.”

“ And that’s all ? ”

“ He pooh-poohs them but uses them for document, and sometimes gets a labourer, a woman or a child to pose while he sketches the hand or head he wants.”

Twenty minutes later they are seated at a table in the cottage garden. Once the ultimate brow had been crossed the hills dropped away abruptly, and a vast, richly-incident plain now shimmers before them in the afternoon sunlight. Stanton treats his guests to a round from a loaf, an inch

thick and piled with stewed mushrooms ; then follow cold ham, cheese, bread, butter, ale and apples. Though he is six or seven years younger than Brown, in Cahil's presence the waning importance of this difference disappears, and the two men amusedly conspire to keep the real youngster conscious of his short experience. At length, a cottage woman having come up the lane, her bonnet-strings flying, and removed the cloth, Brown, soothed by deep whiffs from his pipe, feels that this sterile game has had its due, and says :

" Cahil's troubled over his style and wants your advice."

" H'm ! " Their host muses, and the young man explains.

" I'm not at all satisfied with ' Brooklands.' Brown tells me you've read it."

" Yes, I liked one incident. When Riley becomes conscious of himself as a third person, and with horrified anxiety (the dear friend of both yet powerless to interfere) watches himself break with Mabel."

" You thought the style awful ? "

" There hardly seemed to be any except for those two pages."

“ Yet that incident was purely imaginary.”

“ Of course ; art is imagination : style is happy imagination.”

“ Surely you don’t think the control of language a mere effect of inspiration—of luck ? ”

“ What do *you* mean by style ? ”

“ Appropriate words in appropriate places was more or less what Swift said, was it not ? ”

“ If there is an appropriate word and place for it that takes all control out of your hands ; you have merely to find it.”

“ Yes, I like that ! We should get rid of all those monkey tricks, of which the prevalence is shown up by Max Beer-bohm’s ‘ Christmas Garland ’ ; yet he could not even keep his preface clear of them ! ”

“ Very likely not ; but is there no originality in the way of writing which is not a fault ? Is nothing better than conformity to the structure of the language ? for though that may require great painstaking it can scarcely exercise genius.”

“ Don’t you think it is a kind of genius to be simply right, like Jane Austen ? ”

"Perhaps, but might not genius be sufficiently exercised in providing thought and perception ? "

"Of course. I will never try fine writing again, but trust to seeing things and thinking about them in a new way."

"Why a *new* way ? "

"Well, if one has nothing new to say, why not shut up shop ? "

"You would not care for your novelties to be true as well as new ? "

"Of course they should be true, at least, truer."

"Then it comes back to painstaking again ; for, though a divination may be true, only painstaking can prove it so."

"It might be obviously right."

"It might only seem obviously right."

"One must do one's best."

"And if the best one could do were to take pains ? "

"Abominable suggestion ! " laughs Brown, but the young man, undistracted, resumes : "So you think there's nothing for it but just grind ? " and Stanton, relighting his pipe, replies : "Let's turn the question

round. When St. Francis said he had been over hard on 'his brother the donkey' (meaning his own body) the sin he was conscious of was trivial compared with that which he had committed in the eyes of an admirer of Nijinsky. Yet had Anatole France stood by the ascetic's pallet-side, he would have appreciated his bearing, words and smile as perfect, while concurring in a much severer judgment than the saint's own; we can hear him murmur '*Criminel séduisant !*' "

" I don't understand yet."

" You would allow the humour and sweetness of that inadequate confession to be well-nigh perfect, though you had no least inclination to approve the incapacitating rigours that had wasted the man till he was not heavier or larger than a sick child ? "

" I suppose I might."

" Then it is not necessary to express a true judgment with perfect plainness to attain style. For this assertion had style, yet we most admire it for the inadequacy of the statement and the injustice of the metaphor."

" Great Scot, what are you driving at ? "

“ Think.”

“ Of course, all depends on what we know about St. Francis.”

“ Shall we say the plainest and truest statement possible, given the speaker’s time and place ? ”

“ You mean things may be put badly in drama because men really do think by halves and resort to cheap rhetoric ? ”

“ That was not my meaning. Has any good play been written on that principle ? ”

“ Shaw’s ? ”

“ Shaw focuses interest on a conflict of opinions in which his own opinions always win. It would never do if his hero-ideas were put less persuasively than those he opposes.”

“ Well, Galsworthy ? ”

“ His characters are also lay figures, the real action is an argument, the incidents are mere scaffolding. He may have less charm and piquancy, but that does not make him more serious. These men do not live their art ; it is for them a political weapon, a means to a practical end.”

“Shaw lives in pure farce, I think,” interjects Brown.

“I am not sure that I agree about Galsworthy,” Cahil muses; but then adds briskly, “What did you mean?”

“There is something,” Stanton resumes, “which makes us love and admire actions, utterances and writings even when we do not think the actions right nor concur in the thoughts. Will you pass that? and if so, can you discover what it is?”

“Ah, when they are beautiful!

‘Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down.’

Which is as untrue a statement about nightingales as any man need hope to make.”

“Shake hands.”

“All right, but why?”

“I congratulate you on having Keats at the tip of your tongue. How comes that rhetorical lie of his to be so beautiful?”

“I can’t say, if you ask me like that.”

“Let me try to be more insinuating. Suppose you were strolling with a portly company-director of an uncle along the

bank of the Avon yonder, and saw some young bathers scramble up the bank and run about pelting one another with mushrooms, the water being a little colder than they liked and the sun still warm. You would think it bad form in that stockbroker to discover his unwieldy frame and join in, yet you yourself (provided that they were friends) might have no shame in doing it. But if money-bags merely said: 'How I should like to be young enough for that!' he would rise in your esteem."

"I am more fogged than ever."

"His wish would prove his imagination still alert."

"Yes."

"Any act, utterance or report which we feel to be exquisitely appropriate to the conceived occasion, has style; it liberates sympathy and replenishes the soul. Thus art increases life."

"Even though it be by a waste of good mushrooms in a country where millions are short of food, or by a raving lie about a bird in a back garden," adds Brown, with the intention of relieving a heavy argument.

“Do I make myself clear ?” asks Stanton, ignoring Brown, and courting Cahil’s clouded face: “An author may be wrong about his facts, but must then be as delicately loyal to his error as though it were full complex truth.”

“Will this test apply to the choice of words ?”

“When actions are clumsy and constantly balk themselves, the scene loses significance and charm ; so if the narration stumbles, we only half apprehend ; if phrases jolt and clash we are distraught and thrown out of humour.”

“But verisimilitude is as important as harmony,” Cahil persists.

“No.”

“Romans must not wear silk hats.”

“Why not ? Shakespeare speaks of their breeches.”

Anxious to prove himself as serious as the others, Brown brings out : “Physical laws are the important thing. Stevenson should never have made Henry Durie’s wife drive her husband’s sword into frozen earth.” Which Stanton follows with :

"No doubt, but mythology defies physics. Imaginations must be self-consistent: they need not tally with the known world."

"The absurd at least is taboo," Cahil posits; and is astounded to be immediately contradicted by the guide whose counsel he has sought.

"Not at all. When finely used, preposterous circumstance frees the mind from prejudice bred by life's trivial iterance. Farces and fairy-tales delight as much, and often have more psychological power, than realistic novels. They illuminate the mind better and form more beautiful wholes. Paul Claudel's attempt to create tragedy in an absurd world is by no means certainly a failure."

"Surely the profoundest psychology must rest upon fact."

"Man's success is a poise. To settle down is to fail."

Brown, wincing from this assertion, retrieves complacency with: "Yet the broad basis of their experience gives solidity to the work of a Shakespeare or a Goethe."

But Stanton is uncompromising.

“The next step is always an adventure, so we appreciate the attitude that expresses freedom from the past more than one which staggers under it. Man is ever between and betwixt. A savage, a Michael Angelo,—both are conscious of ignorance, each surmises a finer fellow than himself. For either, what he finds in the moment may balance what he brings into it, and so permit an erect posture, a smile, even a contemplative survey, with the full realization of present capacity. This poise gives style to his bearing and work. He advances and it is lost, through no fault of his own; but until found again, his bearing and productions lose lustre, like an almond tree between spring and spring: while the main structure of his mentality improves, the felicity of his achievement is in abeyance. He is making wood, till success flower again in delicate perfection.” He puts the pipe, still only charred on the top, into his pocket.

“You would admit every experiment?” queries Brown in the tone of one setting a trap.

“Yes. Style should crown effort as a day’s

work might culminate in an exquisite dream. Neither result can be foreseen. Tortuous thought suddenly smoothes out ; rhythm is established, the most disparate items articulate, as in an athlete's body there is a flawless progression from top to toe."

"Cubism is still in its agony, no doubt," snaps Brown, with rather less assurance than he had counted on.

"I said that more experiments fail than succeed. It is generous though difficult to regard cubism as an hopeful adventure. I am no prophet." And Brown, accepting the failure of his little snare, attacks the world with :

"The vile thing is the way these crudities are advertised for the sake of journalistic copy and the dealer's boom." Which rouses Cahil's sympathetic solidarity with youth and daring,—

"Recognition may help the experimenter, at least ?" on which Stanton resumes :

"It is highly pleasurable, therefore may stimulate, but often intoxicates, contents, deludes, blinds. For me man's body fathers his mind, which is related in every part to

its parent. Geometrical and abstract forms doubtless have such a relation, which discovered would seem beautiful ; but in so far as their work is not merely notional—in so far, that is, as it is at all imaginative, those fellows apparently strive to exasperate our sense of bodily form by outraging it, just as Baudelaire sometimes deliberately blasphemed against our sense of psychological integrity—a narrow aim which, taken together with its as yet unrealized success, could hardly form more than an aside, an eddy in the stream of art.”

“ Man’s body fathers his mind ? ” repeats the young man, puzzled.

“ I admit the doctrine is a shade mystical,” smiles the other, “ though it might be scientifically defended, for apparently the body is always ahead of the brain in complexity. Physical capacity, delicate, seeing, hearing, touching, moving, prompt before the mind, conceives relations. Thought is action for children and animals, imagination begins with mimicry. May not the scope of thought be simply a conscious map of relations between the body, and all things

fit either to exercise it or to charge it with desire ? Beauty would then be that aspect of things which is seen along the direct line of those relations, and the universe be lovely in so far as we face it squarely ; any oblique view being more or less distorted because it is not proper to the body, and therefore neither primes the soul with intention nor trains it to act. Imagination is the grandest life, and naïvely, passionately resolves every complexity, every abstraction into terms of sensuous immediacy. Style is born from and nourished on physical health,—which a debile poet may know more of than an athlete, for men often realize better what they lack than what they enjoy. As I sit watching this great bath of light and air while veils of shadow and mist endlessly recompose its perspectives, I repeat :

‘ For spirits, when they please,
 Can either sex assume, or both ; so soft
 And uncompounded is their essence pure,
 Not ty’d or manacled with joint or limb,
 Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
 Like cumbrous flesh ; but in what shape they choose,
 Dilated or condens’d, bright or obscure,
 Can execute their airy purposes,
 And works of love or enmity fulfil.

For spirits that live throughout,
 Vital in every part, not as frail man
 In entrails, heart or head, liver or reins,
 Cannot but by annihilating die ;
 Nor in their liquid texture mortal wound
 Receive, no more than can the fluid air :
 All heart they live, all head, all eye, all ear,
 All intellect, all sense ; and as they please
 They limb themselves, and colour, shape or size
 Assume, as likes them best, condense or rare.'

Man's body in that becomes as plastic as for Michael Angelo. Everything is beautiful that chimes in with such a dream."

"How is the body exercised or charged with intention ?" asks Brown, "by imagining its physical conditions and limits set at naught ?"

"The most unliterary people dream of flying. All children revel asleep in the abeyance of the mechanism of locomotion. There is their home !" cries Stanton, pointing into the ineffable westward of cloud-varied light. "Our bodies sufficiently resemble those of birds for us to covet their grace and freedom of movement. Reverence for this anatomy may become so intense as to isolate it from all contingency.

And, appropriately, the giant Italian saw his figures *in vacuo* and, relenting to the suasion of reason, scarcely indicated neighbourhood otherwise than as the words 'ground' or 'cloud' define. Yet he set a jar near the foot of his newly-created Adam. Is it there for the Almighty to dip his fingers in as he moulds the stiff clay? or did he shape that first, a vessel for dishonour, as he now, having modelled man from the same lump, honours him with life. Or did the artist feel that, enigmatical, its presence would turn our light minds back to reconsider his taper deification of mere man's members, till the impression of even their puissance had been absorbed into that of their harmonious fineness?—or perchance its agreeable roundity stood beside the model one day and struck his fancy? So entirely is the significance of the work one with its style, any, every interpretation of that jar must seem trivial. This dream has juggled with the proportions of the body till they become the embodiment of an otherwise unutterable thought. Rembrandt with an equal magic dissolves detailed stuntedness and squalor

into a vision of clairvoyant tenderness. Attitude and gesture tell us all the most hardly used have borne, how their thoughts run and on what. So we see foreign figures in our dreams, and suddenly know what they think as though we had entered their minds. The miracle is the intimate correspondence between all that sordid tragedy and lovely surfaces of paint, the caresses and decisions of an inspired brush. A myriad opportunities for such creative felicities await the imagination. Materials and theme matter little, though once chosen they set limits." In his last phrase Stanton has attempted to descend from the tone of speculative admiration to that of argument, yet an uneasy silence follows, while the others try in vain to resume the main drift of his flight. At length Brown, mystified by the association of Michael Angelo with Rembrandt, rather aimlessly ventures :

" You admit no standard then ? Style is always relative ? "

" No, positive, like health ; the criterion is inherent, essential ; recognition cannot alter a fact."

“ ‘ Mute inglorious Miltons ? ’ ”

“ Plenty of them ; fame is an accident, so is growth—propitious circumstances are accidental.”

This, Cahil, whose youth places those of the renowned whom he reverences on a top shelf apart, corrects: “ Not fame, popularity,” to which Brown, once more dialectically at ease, rejoins: “ Successful people are always popular, and glory is popularity with professors.” But Stanton brushes both demurrers aside, and asserts: “ No. They are often despised and rejected. Success is relative to the man, not to the crowd or to more advanced people, or even to an ideal.”

“ A plumber, then, may glow with real success,” quizzes Brown, “ and give style to his work, though no one, not even himself, remark on it ! ”

“ The perception of style depends entirely on the reader, its presence on the writer. Success in the world must then depend on a foregone affinity between them, and it may be no fault of the author’s if this does not exist.”

“ We might estimate writers by the types of which their publics are formed.”

“ If we could explore the minds of sufficient readers.”

“ So anything may be a true success,” sighs Cahil, still probing the essential idea ; which causes Stanton to start with : “ Bosh ! there are thousands of peaks in the Himalayas, but also ravines, valleys, tablelands, shoulders. From every head one must descend before climbing higher ; it is known by its silhouette. Between a savage and Michael Angelo there are countless summits of achievement. This character belongs to their form, irrespective of their relative heights. The analogy is to health ; a mouse may be as hale as a Goethe.” On this Brown once more attempts to escape into a more playful atmosphere by asking : “ Then masterpieces are like statues on Milan Cathedral ; the essential is that each should be where no one can easily examine it ? ”

“ Yes, all are pinnacles ; other works may be as or more skilful, as or more like the highest placed of all, as or more original, traditional, etc., but only an apex

of up-soaring life has style matured, crystallized."

"That is perhaps the truth," Cahil allows, intent as ever. "But how is one to apply it?"

"Possibly there is a tug-of-war between past and future. Along the rope steps the soul. When they exactly counter the puppet can stand upright, but the moment either gains ground it must run or contort its limbs to keep so precarious a path."

"Go on, please."

"Between knowledge and intuition the soul has the same difficult task, and can rarely stand at ease."

"You make me dizzy."

"Between self-realization and worship."

"Worship?"

"Admiration, the sincerest flattery, the labour of love."

"Self-realization?"

"Those are effects of humility, gasping, eager, precarious conditions; but success in love, success in emulation, self-approval, steady and relieve the soul, and countervail its tiptoe trembling caution. There is no

long rest. The rope underneath jolts and down comes the mannikin. Relief is only wholesome for just so long ; but, while it lasts, adds a something to the painted work, to the poet's rhythm, to the bearing of the man. And this something is always present in and necessary to the ideal."

"It is ?"

"Unscrupulousness," cries Brown. Secretly he likes to think an etching has been no end of a "swat" and resents the bravura of assurance. Stanton's phrase about relief from caution has stayed with him, and he flushes when the retort comes: "That is the pedant's way of putting it, arid and issueless." But he has time to cool, for Cahil eagerly takes up the ball with "But you meant?" and Stanton volleys back: "Style. The absence of scruples need comport no readiness to smother them, yet that is the actual force of the word 'unscrupulous.' Some acts of cruelty have as witching style as St. Francis' all-too-little-humble confession. The tiger with grand inevitability brings down the gazelle. A Don Juan might magnificently mock at

those who think they have established virtue in a permanent form. Keats lies about the nightingale at precisely the right moment with exactly the appropriate frame of mind. Blake's hasty aphorisms often have more charm than Wordsworth could command when he felt most profound. When Shelley despairs, his style soars far above anything attained by him in belabouring his artificial political and philosophic hopes. Byron's language, when he glows with sympathy for courage under wrongs endured, shames the gush of his irony and sarcasm."

"Shelley best in despair?" gasps Cahil.

"'To-night,' 'Time Long Past,' 'The Flower that Smiles To-day,' 'To a Skylark.'"

"'The Skylark'?" It is the elder man's turn to cry astonished.

"'Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.'"

The main theme is the impossibility of joy for man. Yet even Leopardi cries:

'Lice, lice al mortal, non è già sogno
Come stimai gran tempo, ah! lice in terra
Provar felicità.'"

* Mortals may, may—it is no dream as I have so long thought it—we may on earth experience happiness.

"Shelley is a quaint pessimist," Brown throws in reflectively.

"I meant merely that dejection inspired him more finely than elation. Of course, sheer despair is an act and takes the man beyond our jurisdiction. Impiety alone calls suicide a crime. Shelley was inhumanly confident and rash, he needed damping before he could produce his best. But even Leopardi's pessimism invigorates better than Wordsworth improving an occasion, though I agree with Arnold that when Wordsworth achieves style he cheers as well as braces."

"Then the effect on the reader is the criterion?" argues Brown; "and the Religious Tract Society have the right aim and only fail by mistaking the means."

"There is a shade of truth in that. But any success not due to form is out of the question. The felicity of style is no symbol for any other sort of welfare. In murder, in despair, in rebellion against good, men have achieved style; and how many excellent intentions and well-meant efforts fail of it every day!"

"How many prosperous undertakings lack even decency!" Brown caps.

"The soul," the other continues, "responds with relief to Littré's lament that the earth is a very inferior planet and man an unlucky hybrid; but she also thrills as though her burden had been lifted when Russel Wallace asserts that the whole astronomical heaven centres in this earth, and exists solely for the sake of man's development. No doubt reflection may convince her that the evidence does not authorize either conclusion. However, we recognize that both tempers lend dignity to the lives permeated by them:—Thomas Hardy, say, and W. B. Yeats,—as did Darwin's passionate caution to his."

"But how am I to apply all this to writing a novel?" asks the neophyte.

"Ought you to write novels? The precisely correct answer to that question is a first condition. When we mechanically or by force of circumstances write novels, back our party or wrestle with injustices and demand votes, we are very likely not to achieve style."

"I can't help feeling that you confuse the issue by referring me so constantly to morals, to politics."

"Literature only triumphs when it is a genuine part of life: it must not be a mere pastime," Stanton sententiously rules.

"But why lug in votes?" insists the elder of his interlocutors.

"A contrast has recently run in my head between the Chinese students and our suffragettes. The six who had passed highest in 1910 went into the assembly of notables and read a petition for a democratic parliament, then demonstrated their sincerity by disembowelling themselves on the spot. The notables wept aloud, carried the dabbled petition to the Gate of the Inviolable Palace, and waited there till a prince of the blood consented to take it to the Emperor, who signed the drafted law besmeared with red from martyr veins.

"That has style compared with the goings on of our ex-ladies. Let me see if I can find the cutting." He enters his cottage.

"They succeeded in the world too,"

observes Brown, but the young man flushes up and shouts :

“ Had they failed the action would have been equally splendid ! ” And Stanton, searching through an album on the sill of the window, fires out at them :

“ The beauty of style always makes us feel that success in the world without it is a bastard article not worth its cost. Here I have it ! Wait ! ”

“ Who would not rather be Parnell than Redmond ? ” yawns Brown.

“ Does that mean more than a dead and consecrated leader rather than a live one still in the balance ? ” asks his young friend.

“ Well, Blake rather than Reynolds—— What’s the matter, Stanton ? ”

“ The tricks memory plays one ! I have described what they intended to do, but actually only two wounded themselves at all seriously ; one ripping a tendon out of his arm and the other ploughing up his thigh. You see they were interfered with. The rest only cut their fingers ; the notables were too quick for them.”

“Let’s see,” and Brown stretches over for the album while Cahil jumps up from the grass to peer over his shoulder. “*Journal des Débats*, Vendredi, 4 Novembre, 1910.” Stanton takes out his pipe and relights it while he stands watching them. Brown looks up with “There seems to be nothing here about how they passed their exams. What an instinct for style you have, Stanton! You have compressed this long and confused rigmarole into a jewel of history as she is taught!”

Their host deprecates their hilarity with “I beg your pardons,” then joins in the laugh, and at last plucks up with “Perfection is never an attribute of things done, but merely of what waits doing: and my Chinese had at least a clear vision of that. But I think I heard you comparing Blake and Reynolds?”

“Brown said, who would not rather have been Blake?” and the elder man claims his property with “Let’s force a Stantonian contrast between them. Blake helped to smuggle Tom Paine out of this bigoted country: Reynolds only helped to smuggle

pictures out of Italy for his rich patrons. Was not Blake's clash with law and order the more splendid ? ”

“ Pictures were then as grossly neglected in Italy as the lower orders everywhere, but our aristocracy was at that moment capable of caring for a costly work of art,” Stanton affirms, “ and the preservation of works of art is of prime human import ; and those who cheat a government with this intent should be as honoured as were good Americans who smuggled negroes north by the ‘ underground railway ’ before the emancipation. Why regard the saving of life as of more moment than the saving of beauty ? If I am right, masterpieces and the record of great deeds constitute humanity's net profits. The neglect of art-treasures may be a greater crime in a government than the neglect of the sweated and unemployed.”

“ But we are drowned in politics and morals ! ” Cahil despairs.

“ You neglect beauty, Stanton,” laughs Brown.

“ Style in a work of art is an effect of the same excellence as a fine tact in social

relations and the disinterested service of mankind in science, or even in administrations."

"Who'd have dreamed the author of 'Evocations' could say that?" sighs Cahil.

"I will tell you a story of my Paris days," the artist continues. "A very narrow allowance forced me off and on to work for publishers, but made it unnecessary to follow up success. With money in my pocket I thought no more of earning it, a little went a long way. Once when very hard up, I got a commission for some illustrations to 'Histoire Comique.' A sort of feeling warned me not to accept it. The publisher wanted quite unexceptionable work, and my bent was highly experimental. However, I admired the book, and set to work to evolve a suitable manner; the figures in every design were to have the same general proportion to the framing line and to one another,—never to be more than four or less than two. All were to be dramatic in aspect, and most, in actual theme, as near blood and thunder as I could make them. Of course the heroine

appeared nude in many, and always as an explosion of white. The ghost was a piece of real invention. There were to be twelve designs and I needed a model with a certain chic. Catching sight of two acquaintances in a café with a showy 'tart' who had just the right touch, I wounded my native delicacy and intruded upon them in spite of a frigid greeting, and then recognized in the woman a girl I had known as a model at a life-class before her figure set. We had been friendly enough and she was quite willing to resume the same tone. After flattering her, I confessed my dilemma. She at once offered to sit, rather pleased as I thought to vex one of her companions. It ended in her sharing my studio for a week (for strangely I felt less shame in borrowing money to keep a woman than to keep myself). The drawings were finished, the publisher refused them, and I wasted days touting them about, trying to persuade other houses to have a story written to the designs, the essentials of a plot for which I sketched to dubious-minded head after head. Financial reasons had forced my good friend

to leave me, and she was happily established with the companion she had vexed at the café table. He was my senior, a budding portrait painter; the pictures of our friend which he exhibited improved his position. A work of definite character would launch him. One day I received a visit from my mistress of two years before; she chatted, gave my more recent misfortunes distracted sympathy, and at length enquired after the drawings. I said, 'Oh, they are up there in the same cover still.' 'Why don't you make a picture of one of the best? I would come and sit. There was something about me which you hit off as nobody else can.'—'Oh, I am not interested in that kind of thing now, I think them forced and cheap.'—'Let me have them then.'—'If you want them.'—'I'll give 10 francs a piece.'—'But how can you? What nonsense!'—'Never mind, here's the money,'—and she began counting it out on the table. 'I'm flush and you hit me off so well. Let me see them.' After mature study she chose out most of those in which she appeared, and went, leaving the gold on the

table. I could not afford to despise it, and though I did not like the incident soon consoled myself. A year later, going round the *Salon*, I came on one of these designs done large. It was a picture of the year, and by the vexed companion. There were my chosen proportions, the same relation between the broad-limbed clothed male and the slim nude female, the same balance of lights and darks. Though the workmanship was flashy and shallow, the bone structure of my design sufficed for solid dignity in that waste of blatancies, while Mademoiselle was 'hit off,' I felt, as even I had never done it ;—obviously an exceptional achievement of the hand and mind employed. Outraged, indignant ! those louis seemed to drop into my pocket burning and heavy as they had not been when, half-ashamed, I first swept them from the table. The blood suffused and left my skin from top to toe repeatedly. I sank back on a sofa outside the room where the stolen success hung in front of its ever-changing clot of admirers. At last, having cursed the no longer vexed but vexatious companion, I remembered

how Mademoiselle had sounded me thoroughly—had suggested that I should paint one of the designs large, and had only bought them after she had found me as detached as a rose tree from the petals that strew the bed beneath it. If a child came with a square of glass and, collecting the glowing leaves, made a peep-show by wrapping the whole in paper and pestering kindly grown-ups for a penny or a kiss, (according to their means) before it would lift the trap it had cut in the packet and show those beautiful pallors and blushes crowded behind the glass—why should the rose tree hate ? With such-like meditations I cooled myself. When I got back to my studio I found a *faire-part* letter which announced the marriage of Mademoiselle with the vexatious companion ; and enclosed were two *billets de banque* with a note in the vexatious hand :—

“ ‘ CHER STANTON,

“ ‘ Je t’ai volé une idée que tu as dédaignée ; dans le temps, tu m’as volé une femme que je dédaignais si peu

qu'après tout je suis et fier et heureux de lui donner mon nom. Étrangement tes dessins nous ont unis tout à fait quand nous les avons brûlés un soir : car elle prétendait que mon tableau les surpassait en finesse de ressemblance. Mais nous voulons tous deux te les payer plus convenablement et partager quelque peu notre bonheur avec toi, sa cause, en t'assurant de notre reconnaissance.'

"I was plunged in thought once more ; but no indignation or sense of wrong was mingled with the bath this time. I reflected on the marriage and copyright laws."

"And came to the conclusion that both were more worthy of a pig-sty than of civilized man ? " Brown surmised.

"Naturally they had protected themselves against such a gross-judging world by burning my designs. I could have as little claim to them as to a woman whom another man valued more. He who gives the value has the right in art and life. Our paltry laws would prevent a Shakespeare making a masterpiece of King Lear because it had

been trifled with by a fool: just as we bind a woman to a man who is making an idiot of her, though another stands ready to use her to advantage. So little sense for style have the commercially-minded."

"So you too think there should be no property in life or art?" asks Brown. "Few socialists have gone so far."

"Merely because socialists know nothing about art and care less."

"Three Saturdays back I met one who was even more advanced," the other replied. "Going down for the week-end, I noticed a handsome man of, say, thirty-eight, carefully dressed to look half gentleman, half labourer, in clean corduroys. He sat opposite me. Our eyes met several times. When we both got down at Dorking he smiled: and later, as we both emerged from the town on the Coldharbour road, he crossed over and addressed me. 'I am a socialist, and whenever I see a man with an intelligent smile I suppose he will be glad of a talk. Shall we keep company?' And he at once added that he would neither ask my name nor tell me his own, which would be famous

but for an ineradicable flaw in his character : he had no defence against any woman. ‘ You think,’ he said, ‘ that not a few of the world-renowned have been in the same boat.’ The particularity of his case lay in being able to earn money by indulging his weakness. He could draw fashion plates exactly to the taste of up-to-date ladies, and his nudes had caused a run on a special line of cigarettes for which they garnished boxes. He enjoyed doing work which he thoroughly despised. Only in writing verse could he escape from the obsession of sex ; a longish poem had freed him for more than a fortnight. Words were abstractions, he felt safe with them ; but plastic form enervated his imagination till Don Juan must go a-hunting. The muse apart, women had made him ; he owed even his socialism to a girl who would read Fabian tracts. There was no market for poetry, or he could have risen against the pangynocracy under which he languished. His own stuff must be severely classical, but he did not wonder when poets like Browning or Masfield trespassed on prose. It showed how human

they were. Anyone who knew so well as he how the written word may be enhanced by a strict economy and well-calculated recasting found it difficult, however, to admire work so little removed from improvisation. 'Ah,' he sighed, 'if there were a demand for rewritten Browning, no woman should waste my time again.' I assure you the way he used his eyes and smiled over his own sins made me glad to feel myself a bearded male."

"Picture old Brown in fear of seduction!" Cahil shouts.

"What he said need not seem so absurd as his rolling eyes and vamped-up confessions made it," reflects the artist. "The substance of the best ballads and of Homer had been recast and retinkered by thousands of minstrels and rhapsodists before genius gave the form that even an illiterate public wished to preserve. The same process went on to some degree in all arts before the Renaissance, and continued in a few cases much later."

"As he put it—'Before usury became respectable poetry had never been one man's little job,' " says Brown.

“ Why expect the same mind to invent the fable, flesh it with imagination, and crystalize detail into perdurable phrase and rhythm ? Half the task is always botched. Would not those who write mild essays to appraise Balzac, Tolstoi and Dickens as literature, in spite of their gross faults, not be better employed in rehandling their work with a view to bringing it nearer some possible standard ? ” On which Cahil suddenly asks :

“ *You* can't dream that collaboration could produce the finest work ? ”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Personality seems to me the essence of excellence.”

“ Where individuality is excellent it would subsist. But where it fails might it not be replaced by the more personal excellence of an at-those-points more excellent individual ? That has happened, always happens in some degree ; every man absorbs into his work that of other men.”

“ The bards who altered poems in their frenzy must often have spoiled them.”

“ Of course, at most, improvements had a

little better chance of survival because those who loved poetry best cared most about hearing and remembering it. But grand poems may have been gradually degraded and lost : not all would survive or improve. Reasons might be given for thinking the *Iliad*, like a repainted picture, had once been finer than it is."

"My acquaintance," Brown relates, rising to stretch his legs, "had imagined that development of oral poetry reproduced again on a larger scale ; the machinery was ready in the modern press. Versions of favourite books might compete for survival as soon as socialism was understood and established. Public libraries could store the lineage of masterpieces, so that if a mistake were made a return to an earlier and finer form could be made. He had financial proposals,—a tax levied on all books by the State in order to provide a salary for all living authors who could find a public, either distinguished or, failing that, numerous."

"The waste and confusion of modern book production might be very much re-

duced," Stanton agrees. " Besides, criticism would be forced to focus public attention on quality, so that taste might, at last, grow."

"The reason for glorifying work eminent on one side as though it were a model of every other perfection would be gone."

Hereupon the two elder men please themselves, improving the notion by turns, the artist commencing :

"Two or more versions of a book might be in circulation. I can imagine several of 'Don Quixote' bettering the original yet strongly contrasted with each other. 'War and Peace' could not easily be rewritten without improvement."

"Even bad caricatures of masterpieces would retain some excellence and be less dreadful than most new novels. Classes might be differentiated by the Shakespeare they preferred more reasonably than by income."

"Versions of Faust might diverge as widely as a Bible illustrated by Michael Angelo would have done from Rembrandt's."

“The multitudinous currency of books might at last be so reduced that a single brain could master it once more.”

“Nearly everybody would be forced to read some book more than once in order to compare it with a version preferred by a friend, and to read the same book twice is the beginning of wisdom.”

“How Mudie’s would fight against the reform ! ”

“Fewer and larger issues might be more wieldy than shoals of small stocks, and so the libraries be enabled to save on the intelligence of their employees.”

“I beg pardon, but I hate politics, even Utopias,” Cahil broke in, “and I very much want to get your idea clear in regard to style. We have not many minutes left,” he added, getting up once more from the grass. “You say this felicity may be shown in a friendly note or in Hamlet, by a savage or by Plato ? ”

“Yes.”

“Please explain the analogy between the ‘vexed companion’s’ conduct and

‘Tasting of Flora and the country green
Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth.’ ”

“ You remember what I said about style occurring when an advancing soul comes to poise ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The straining effort is balanced precariously by satisfaction in power and success.”

“ Yes, yes.”

“ Advance means risk run. The sheep must leave the flock, a presumption followed by dislike or even persecution. Besides, lack of precedent, example and the support of habit, increase the psychological danger. Few dare ; and of those few, most fail. The ‘ vexed companion ’ stood in like position, alive to tottering possibilities of gain and loss. His perseverance grasped the sexual and financial prizes which he coveted ; but not, like a knave, content, he must win the friendly approval of the one man whom he, as the world judges, had wronged,—bring *me* to confess that he was justified. Now what can justify save an open, courageous, affectionate temper ? No man’s acts are just. Formal justice is a shell the kernel rots inside. Had he been sullen or secretive

he could not have written that note. A jealous man had never put that generous blush on his stolen apple. A coward must have carried the apparent shame of his deed as though it had the weight of real shame and have sunk under it."

"Well, but Keats?"

"He too was tempted by his inspiration and fertility, but could not be content with Byron's easy victories, or Shelley's self-indulgence, but must win to consistency with his own finest moods and earn their gratitude. There is even more frankness, courage and kindness in 'The Nightingale' than in our French friend's note or in St. Francis' confession, but it is also charged with a far rarer loyalty. Only one who never halts, never repines, seizes all his opportunities; only the artist, as ready to reject as to grab at effect, has loyalty sufficient to improve, as Keats did in a few years, his language, rhythm, imagination, taste, thought and sympathy. Devil take them, there are always plenty of geniuses writing, painting, showing off. But he who prefers those of his work to his own personal interests 'is alone the rare Arabian bird.'"

“It’s fag then ?” Cahil allows ; but the artist particularizes :

“Not mere technical toil—though that may be needed—but life’s inmost effort creating vivid experience and large tenderness. I warn you that to realize all this consciously is to fail. Not with the world, that is a mere accident : you might even succeed there,—but fail in your own eyes,—be married to the consciousness of your own imbecility. Art and life are so complex, so inextricably one ; add courage to intelligence, to imagination add taste,—add rectitude, all is nothing without enthusiasm and still nothing without patience ; and, keeping the whole warm, you will be so much the more likely to miss those moments of contented poise in which a thing comes off. Yet only life in art trains a man’s heart and brain to work together, renders failure as fruitful as victory, transforms contact with the best from knowledge into very being, and never leaves him zestless, however spent or humbled it lay him in the grave.

“In the world the abundance and boisterous force of genius win more than their due,

they are easily appreciated ; they impress by mass and mobility. But *you*, conscious all round, will see those who have not half tried . . .” While Stanton pauses, groping for words, Brown helps him out rhetorically with :

“Drape themselves in purple !” which is ungratefully corrected with—“No, do better.”

“Luck ? ” suggests Cahil.

“What can’t be dubbed luck ? Men do things not conceiving how : they can’t hold on, but they get there. Gift and the moment prove greater than the man. But the clear-headed writer’s task will never be lightened till the Utopia of Brown’s friend is a thing of the past, and all men collaborate to produce nothing short of the best. For until the public is as the master it will always oppress, ignore or delude him. If you are not ready to fail, chuck it, grub for money and simmer in comfort. Write because you can live best and most that way, have no other reason.”

“I think I agree, but practically how am I to begin ? ”

“Always separate, in your own work and in all you read, felicities from the rest.”

“Won’t that lead to preferring a few phrases or half a page to the organisation of a great novel?”

“Not unless you only do it in a small and easy way. Give composition and conception, when fine, their paramount importance. Analyse what you reject so as to understand its failure; but keep what you admire whole and live, and to this end free it in so far as you can from surface imperfections that might hinder a lasting and profound contemplation. No process is more fecund than thus to enhance the glory which you worship. You will return to rehandle your own work with new eyes.”

“Dangerously impertinent, I should think it, thus to tamper with masterpieces!” Brown ejaculates, with a grin.

“The beneficence of the process hangs as by the skin of its teeth to an utter sincerity. The greatest authors have often written badly, but it was not Balzac’s cumbrous phrasing and construction that staggered Stevenson. Cowards always pre-

tend that conscientiousness leads to prizing the fiddling above the great. Fineness is fine just as surely as breadth is broad."

"But fineness may be finicking," Brown insists, glancing at his watch and taking his stick.

"So may breadth be coarse, clumsy and careless ; usually is. All qualities are good. Style is the tip-top harmony of all, the more manifold the more enduring."

"Thanks," Cahil says, holding out his hand. "We must be off or miss our train."

"I'll walk with you," Stanton cries.

"We may have to run," Brown warns him ; but he laughs, "I'll run too."

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

POETRY

POEMS. 1906.

Mr. Moore's best work is drenched in beauty—he can take these old themes and stories, and tell them over again, in a manner that is full of the great tradition and carries its echoes of the past, recalling the Greek way of telling them, and the romantic way too; yet which is no mere copy of either, but his own manner, and one that has the right touch of our day about it. Sometimes he reminds one of such work as that wonderful drawing of Edward Calvert's "Arcadian Shepherds moving their Flocks by Night," sometimes of Mr. C. H. Shannon's beautiful lithographs; but while as intensely Greek and intensely romantic as either Calvert or Mr. Shannon, he is more modern than either in the handling of these ancient things.—*The Times Literary Supplement*, March 18th, 1904.

THE SEA IS KIND. 1914.

It is beautiful as a book alone, apart from its contents, for Mr. Sturge Moore is artist, as well as poet, . . . he has designed the cover of his volume and, as one guesses, ordered the fair setting of its type. The result is one of the most beautiful of recent books of poetry. . . . The poetry of Mr. Sturge Moore springs from a serene state remote from squalor and noise, where all fair things inhabit—fair women, and ships and trees and children, and thoughts. The beauty of these poems is intrinsic, an inward shining lamp of steady glow . . . he yet stands among contemporary singers as a modern poet with the additional advantage of being disinclined to fuss about his modernism.—*T. P.'s Weekly*, May 1st, 1914.

PROSE

DÜRER. 1904

There is a brooding quiet, a religious calm, over the whole book, as if the spirit of Dürer in his work and in his writings had passed into his commentator, endowing him with something of the like earnest reasonableness and patience. It is a beautiful and serious book, full of the meditations of a mind that stands aside, weighs, ponders, and decides. . . .—ARTHUR SYMONS in the *Outlook*.

CORREGGIO. 1906.

A book that stands out completely from the current criticism of art in its penetrating power and grasp of fundamental ideas. . . . I believe that it is on the main lines of such work as this that æsthetic criticism, if it is to have any vital hold on the intelligent interests of the world, must proceed.

LAURENCE BINYON in the *Saturday Review*.

ART AND LIFE. 1910.

In a day rather impatient of large-mindedness and of profound convictions, we are none the less in the presence of a writer who may deal with such men as Flaubert and Blake on terms of assurance; and, being himself its possessor, may speak of the dangers and obligations of genius without risk of arrogance or lack of sympathy and comprehension.—*The Westminster Gazette*.

